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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the evaluation of training programs for educational personnel, particularly those dealing with special students; and conceptualizes such evaluation as a process requiring three stages. Many elements of the Three-Staged Evaluation which were carried out in the development of a paraprofessional aide training program are briefly described. The dedication of time and resources required for appropriate program development and evaluation is discussed. (Author/SBH)

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Program Evaluation: Its Relationship to Accountability and
the Educational Rights of Children

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Program Evaluation: Its Relationship to Accountability and
the Educational Rights of Children

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ABSTRACT

The use of program evaluation for positive purposes is essential in assuring educators that they are safeguarding the educational rights of children for whom they are responsible. This paper focuses on the evaluation of training programs for educational personnel and conceptualizes such evaluation as a process requiring three stages. Many elements of the Three-Staged Evaluation were carried out in the development of a paraprofessional aide training program at the University of Kansas, briefly described. The dedication of time and resources required for appropriate program development and evaluation is discussed.

Program Evaluation: Its Relationship to Accountability and
the Educational Rights of Children

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The use of program evaluation for positive purposes is essential in assuring educational personnel that they are safeguarding the educational rights of the children for whom they are responsible. Accountability has for some years been a watchword for those who were concerned that teachers, principals, and other school personnel must look at the final outcome of their efforts -- student progress. Evaluation at any level has been looked on by frightened school personnel as a means to "show them up" as being less than perfect teachers. Law suits by disgruntled parents and students over the last few years have done little to dispell the aura of fear around the words "accountability" and "evaluation". However, school personnel who have been introduced to criterion referenced testing, developing instructional objectives and lesson plans, and charting and graphing student responses have begun to breathe a sigh of relief when they have experienced the benefits of this sort of evaluation. They have seen that they can use these techniques to provide learning experiences tailored to the current skill level of the child which will teach him/her new skills with a minimum of frustration and maximum enjoyment. They have seen their own organizational skills increase and have come to feel more confident as instructors. They have seen the value of charting or graphing the child's

progress as they use this information to modify their instructional plans when indicated by the child's rate of success. They have also shared graphs of progress with parents to give them a realistic picture of the child's improvement and to build better understanding, with the parent, of just what the school is attempting to do for the child. They have also found that making clear the child's rate of progress has resulted in sharing with their teaching colleagues successful instructional techniques and materials.

Thus, many educational personnel realize the positive effects of evaluation. Now that we have finally gained in the United States the legal right to a free, appropriate education for all handicapped children, evaluation is not just desirable but legally imperative. It is essential that an individual educational plan be prepared for each handicapped child to insure that the education he/she is receiving is "appropriate". Without evaluation of the outcome of the implementation of the IEP, it will be impossible to know whether that plan has in fact provided an "appropriate" education for the child during the time it has been in force. Similarly, we will know, only when we evaluate his progress in the educational program that has been planned for him, whether we have placed a child in the "least restrictive alternative" required by law.

There are many areas of educational practice which require evaluation, but I would like to focus your attention on the evaluation of training programs for educational personnel; let us conceptualize the stages of evaluation that will be required to assure that trainees will actually acquire the desired skills for making positive changes in children. Perhaps it will be helpful

for us to look at evaluation of a teacher or aide training program as a three-staged concept.

Three-Staged Evaluation: Stage 1. First of all, it is important to evaluate, at various points in their development, training programs designed to train those who have direct responsibility for increasing children's knowledge and skills -- primarily classroom teachers and instructional aides. Such evaluation would appropriately include measures of knowledge acquisition by trainees as well as observations of trainees' actual use of their new skills with children. Data from training programs developed at the University of Kansas by Dr. Rodney Copeland and myself (Copeland and Crowder, 1976; Crowder and Copeland, 1978) have clearly shown that most trainees require feedback on their utilization of newly acquired skills in order to incorporate them into their natural classroom behavior. Certainly this means that practicum experiences (Crowder and Cossairt, 1976) monitored by trained observers must be available as an integral part of the training program. The observers must be able to give immediate feedback of a non-threatening nature to the trainees as they are taught new procedures and techniques of teaching and management. Evaluation of program effectiveness in producing skill change in teacher trainees will assure that the program is adequate to produce a standard of competency in the classroom. Consumer satisfaction is another aspect of training which must be evaluated during the development of a program.

Preferably the development of a training program should take place over several years so that alterations and refinements can be made as a result of

sequential evaluation procedures (Crowder, Terry, Copeland, and Hobbs, 1978). Ultimately program validation must take place, evidenced by appropriate academic skill changes in children as a function of skills produced in their teachers by the training program. Otherwise, we have no assurance that the skills we have produced in teachers and aides are those which really matter in changing children's skills.

Stage 2. Once the training program has been developed with appropriate use of evaluation, the preparation of teachers and teacher aides via that training program must be evaluated to assure that the program is producing the expected competencies in all trainees, who may have varying levels of entry skills as they come into training. This kind of evaluation constitutes a type of quality control, i.e., we have a demonstrably effective manufacturing process (that is, training program) to turn out specified skills in teachers and aides, but quality control assurance requires evaluation of the product. It is important for teacher and aide training programs to evaluate not only the knowledge but the actual classroom skills of the trainees, so that at least sampling observations must be made in practicum settings. It is likely that real-life teacher/aide training will take place in much less structured settings than did the development of the training program; therefore, it cannot simply be assumed that the same skills will be developed in "regular trainees" that were developed in those "demonstration trainees" involved in program development.

Stage 3. And finally, evaluation must continually be made of the progress of those children being taught by newly trained personnel. For special education students such evaluation will now happen as a matter of course if both

the spirit and the letter of the requirements of Public Law 94-142 for the individual education plan are met. For children in regular classes it will require a dedication to accountability on the part of the classroom teacher or aide and his/her administrative supervisor.

Such an approach to the evaluation of training programs certainly requires a significant expenditure of time and funds. In the instructional-aide training program we have developed at Kansas (Copeland, Terry, and Crowder, in press), it has been possible to include most of the elements of the Three-Stage Evaluation process. Over a five year period the Experimental and Special Projects Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health has provided a level of funding necessary to allow us first to develop (and evaluate throughout development) a program of training for a school-based aide capable of promoting the mental health of child clients and their families through attention to both their behavior/social and academic needs. Following three years of development, the training program ("P.A.C.A.: Paraprofessionals As Change Agents) was field-tested nationally for almost two years (Crowder, Terry, Copeland, and Hobbs, 1978), allowing us the opportunity to evaluate the generality of the program in a variety of settings and to make final modifications of the total training package. This sort of endeavor is expensive, and it requires considerable dedication on the part of project personnel and the continuing support and sponsorship of a funding group. Being in a setting where program development and evaluation is valued certainly facilitates such an effort. But the result seems more than worth it: an extensive but easily-administered program² of proven training

capability for aides working in numerous settings, with validation of its positive effect on child clients.

The conviction that training programs which mold the skills of classroom personnel must be given exacting evaluative scrutiny is a prerequisite to the dedication of time and resources required to develop such programs. It is only with that conviction, dedication and the work that evolves from them that we will have a real start at assuring every child's right to a free public education.

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²The P.A.C.A. Training Program is designed to prepare paraprofessionals to work with children presenting academic and social problems in a community setting. Specifically, the package teaches the trainee skills to: define the child's problem in observable terms; assess, if necessary, the child's academic deficiencies; devise ways to measure the occurrence of the problem; develop realistic goals for the child; devise a remedial plan utilizing appropriate academic materials when called for; implement the plan using positive behavioral techniques; change the remedial treatment if data reveal a lack of progress; and maintain good public relations with parents, teachers, and professionals.

Training areas include: measurement of social and academic behavior, principles of behavior management, educational assessment, instructional objectives and lesson plans, and parent involvement/public relations. Length of training varies dependent on the particular needs of the setting, but most commonly is carried out over a period of six to nine months, with one to two sessions weekly. This time-frame allows sufficient time for the trainee to carry out a behavior management project and to gain practicum experience in

assessment tools, developing instructional objectives and lesson plans, and tutoring techniques.

The complete training package includes the P.A.C.A. Guide for Professional Trainers, commercially-available training and testing materials, and a 16 mm movie produced by the University of Kansas. Further information on the P.A.C.A. Training Program can be obtained from the author at the following address: Juniper Gardens Children's Project, 2021 N. 3rd Street, Kansas City, Kansas 66101.

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